

Homily by Canon Philip Dyson: Sunday 7th March 2021

3rd Sunday in Lent

Readings (Year B): 1st: Exodus 20:1-17. 9-13. 15-18. Psalm: 18.

2nd: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25. Gospel: John 2:13-25

El Greco, great painter of the 16th cent, has a magnificent painting of the Cleansing of the Temple. It is a very tempestuous scene. Jesus holds central place. His eyes are flashing: his right hand holding the whip of cords is poised to strike. All around him is pandemonium; tables falling over, merchants holding up their arms to protect themselves, bystanders aghast. All four gospel writers record this incident. Only John tells of the whip of cords.

The Greek Philosopher Aristotle said: ‘Anybody can become angry – that is easy: but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not within everybody’s power and it is not easy.’ We can be sure that in the cleansing of the temple Jesus was angry with the right people, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way.

Aggression is part of our make-up, and plays an important part in the way we relate to others. Anger is a powerful emotion that can get the better of us – or bring out the best in us, or the worst in us. It can eat away within us, nursing anger is not good for us or others. Constructive anger can mean taking the initiative to support what is important. It is the driving force behind much needed reforms, a positive response to injustice.

Uncontrollable rage is destructive. There has been much anger across the world since the lockdowns. Some right, some wrong. Jesus’ zeal for his Father’s house, the Temple was the motivation and source of his righteous anger. Jesus’ zeal compels him to act to restore the Temple to what it was intended to be: ‘a house of prayer for all people.’

The Lenten season challenges us to consider what makes us angry enough to change ourselves and our attitudes and perspectives, in

order to restore and recreate our lives and world in the compassion and justice of God.

To raise one's voice against injustice; to stand up to the powerful on behalf of the weak; to demand accountability of those who exploit and abuse others is to imitate the courageous vision of Jesus.

Jesus' angry toppling of the trader's booths and tables is a condemnation of the injustice and exploitation of the faithful in the name of God.

So empty and meaningless has their worship become that God will establish a new 'temple' in the resurrected body of Jesus. His coming means a purge. So it is always.

As it is with the shrine of our hearts so it is with the Temple. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit from our baptism.

Everything in John's gospel is written in the light of the resurrection. They understood then that the great meeting place with God would no longer be identified with the temple in Jerusalem, but in and through the risen Lord.

The new temple, the new dwelling place of the Father, the new place of sacrifice, the new source of blessings was Jesus. The cleansing was almost a prophetic prediction of the destruction of the Temple in AD70 which the readers would perhaps have witnessed or certainly knew about.

Worship in truth is worship according to the revelation of Jesus, which finds its perfection in the Eucharist. After his resurrection, this body of Christ, sign of the divine presence here below, will experience a new transfigured state which will permit it to make itself present in all places and at all times in the celebration of the Eucharist.

It is in the Eucharist that we become one with the body of Christ.

Canon Philip Dyson